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TAGS: BK MARR PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: BOSNIA: ADMIRAL ULRICH URGES OFFICIALS TO MEET PFP REQUIREMENTS

REF: SARAJEVO 1563

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas L.McElhaney. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) During a July 19-20 visit to Sarajevo, Admiral Harry Ulrich, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and NATO Forces South, met separately with Presidency members Zeljko Komsic and Haris Silajdzic, Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic, Chief of the General Staff Lieutenant General Sifet Podzic and High Representative Miroslav Lajcak. In each meeting Admiral Ulrich explained that the purpose of his visit was to congratulate Bosnia on its successes in defense reform, urge continued reform implementation and to determine how to adjust the NATO Bosnia staffing levels to best meet the current needs of its Bosnian military partners. Defense Minister Cikotic said defense reform is proceeding well and has become an important part of the state-building process in Bosnia. Cikotic said he was confident that the defense property transfer agreement was on the right track. CHOD Podzic said that an inadequate defense budget, redundant military personnel and large stockpiles of excess weapons were the primary challenges confronting his staff. President Komsic acknowledged the need for, and promised to support, increases to the military budget. High Representative Lajcak agreed that Bosnia needs to reduce its security dependency, but urged that NATO retain a visible presence in Bosnia to assist with the Pfp and defense reform processes. Admiral Ulrich told the Presidency and Minister Cikotic that, as a result of his visit, he had concluded that the current NATO headquarters in Bosnia is outdated and overstaffed. He said NATO would work with the Ministry of Defense to develop a transition plan by October. End Summary.

Minister Cikotic

¶2. (C) On July 20, Admiral Ulrich began a day of meetings with Bosnian officials with a discussion with Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic. Minister Cikotic noted that the defense reform process is well underway and is becoming an important part of the state-building process. Defense reform

is actually becoming a model for other state-level initiatives and for resolving historical disputes between the entities. Cikotic said he was proud of the role of defense reform in building an effective state and contributing to stability and growth in Bosnia. Fulfillment of Bosnia's Partnership for Peace (PfP) responsibilities is a top priority for the Ministry, Cikotic said. He is aware that Bosnia is being invited to participate as a country, not just a military, and that the armed forces will be required to work closely with other government agencies to support the overall reform process.

Defense Property/Budget Issues

13. (C) Cikotic said that the defense property transfer process is on the right track. Although he had not yet seen the proposed agreement reached by entity prime ministers (reftel), Cikotic understood that, while not an ideal solution, it would meet the needs of the Defense Ministry and would contribute to the final resolution of defense property disputes. Admiral Ulrich noted that one aspect of Bosnia's PfP obligations would include ensuring a stable defense budget. The current budget allocation of 1.7 percent of the national budget is insufficient to sustain a viable military.

Cikotic replied that future personnel cuts will help reduce personnel costs in the budget and that he is hopeful for increased appropriations for FY08.

NATO SOFA

14. (C) Admiral Ulrich noted that the ratification of a NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) remains outstanding. Cikotic replied that he had discussed the NATO SOFA with Foreign Minister Alkalaj recently and that the draft text had been submitted to the Council of Ministers for ratification in early July. The draft was currently being reviewed by the Ministries of Finance and Justice and, after final ratification, will probably be sent to Brussels around the beginning of September.

Modifying NATO Presence

15. (C) Asked by the Admiral whether he was satisfied with the current structure of the Bosnia NATO mission, Cikotic replied that he has all the NATO support he currently needs but the Presidency has not yet articulated a clear vision of how it intends to realize the next steps in the accession process. Admiral Ulrich proposed that the Ministry, in conjunction with NATO, develop one- and three-year defense advisory and training plans, looking to the United States to supplement any roles that NATO cannot fill. Cikotic agreed to begin the planning process with NATO by early October.

16. (C) The Admiral asked Cikotic how much longer an international community military presence would be required in Bosnia noting that there are many competing needs for personnel and resources around the world. Cikotic replied that there is no timetable but the continued need would be determined by the situation on the ground. Bosnia still needs EUFOR and, although the number of EUFOR soldiers is irrelevant, their symbolic presence will still be required for the foreseeable future. Regardless of the EUFOR role, Bosnia will also continue to require a strong NATO presence to assist with the defense reform process.

CHOD Podzic

17. (C) During a separate meeting, Lt. General Sifet Podzic, Chief of the General Staff, noted that while political parties are mired in stalemates over police and constitutional reforms the Ministry of Defense and armed forces had kept moving forward. He noted that the process of rationalizing armed forces staffing levels was continuing

with last year's demobilization of 3500 surplus military personnel. General Podzic noted that the armed forces were now actually understaffed and were seeking to bring in an additional 1000 new recruits. Podzic said he had faced political pressures when seeking to rationalize troop numbers and had been told to maintain a bloated force of 10,000 soldiers. However, he had prevailed in his determination to make cuts and succeeded in reducing the force to its current 16500. Podzic said there are few remaining obstacles to defense reform and that training and equipping the Bosnian forces would be his main objective in the years ahead. His primary challenge was the numbers of personnel and resources required to secure excess weapons and ammunition.

¶ 8. (C) Admiral Ulrich noted that Bosnia would need to engage in an honest self-assessment to determine the way to best engage NATO to advance its reform goals. Podzic reiterated that Bosnia's intention is to become a full member of NATO within three years. He said that the armed forces would begin to develop NATO-specific niche capabilities over the next two years and he would seek to increase Bosnia's military budget.

A Multi-Ethnic Military

¶ 9. (C) The Admiral noted that the Bosnian armed forces would succeed only in so far as Bosnia's multi-ethnic society also succeeds and asked General Podzic how he intends to maintain momentum in pursuit of that goal. Podzic replied that the Joint Staff has members from all the constituent peoples and that there have been no ethnic tensions on the Staff during his tenure. Although Podzic asserted that the Bosnian

military is well integrated he acknowledged that many "ethnically pure" units still exist and that the mixed EOD units deployed to Iraq are broken up and members returned to their original units upon their return to Bosnia. He stated however that these current conditions are only an "interim state" and that his goal was to build a fully multi-ethnic military.

The High Representative

¶ 10. (C) New High Representative Miroslav Lajcak highlighted the poisoned political climate and deadlocked government in Bosnia and described his personal goal as normalization of the political atmosphere as soon as possible. He said that the European integration process is critical to a successful future for Bosnia and that defense reform is a key part of that process. He noted that OHR had been closely involved in the defense reform process to date and that the recent defense property agreement had received the "cautious approval" of OHR. His first priority, however, would be a new push for police reform in early September.

ICTY

¶ 11. (C) The High Representative noted that his first action as High Representative had been an ICTY-related use of the Bonn Powers and that he had visited NATO at Camp Butmir on his first day in the job. He had consciously chosen these steps as a public signal of his seriousness on war crimes issues. Admiral Ulrich said he welcomed the High Representative's use of the Bonn Powers. However, NATO's presence in Bosnia has not resulted in the detention of a single war criminal and should be reexamined to gauge its effectiveness in that capacity. The Admiral suggested that Bosnia would be best served by "efficient justice" in ICTY-related matters and, to that end, might be better served by using its own law enforcement authorities to effect ICTY-related detentions.

¶ 12. (C) The High Representative agreed that Bosnia suffers from "a culture of dependence" and should be encouraged to take responsibility for apprehending its own war criminals.

However, NATO's continued presence in Bosnia, in some capacity, remains crucial. Bosnia's NATO aspirations are an important part of the reform progress already made. Given that Bosnia will become a NATO member long before it accedes to the European Union, a NATO presence, in some capacity, remains essential.

Presidency

¶13. (C) Zeljko Komsic, Chairman and Croat member of the Tri-Presidency opened a joint meeting with Admiral Ulrich by noting that Bosnia is making good progress along the path to its final objective of full NATO membership. The invitation to join PfP was an essential encouragement for Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and without the U.S. role this would have not been possible. Komsic stated that he intends to use the military as a model of what is possible in Bosnia adding that it is impossible to separate defense reform from the rest of the reform process in Bosnia. Citing the recent handover of Eagle Base in Tuzla, Komsic stated that the withdrawal of NATO forces from Bosnia is good for the country but asked for a continued presence in a modified form. Komsic agreed that military funding levels in Bosnia are too low and promised to support measures to increase the budget of the armed forces. Bosniak Presidency member Haris Silajdzic noted that Bosnians are grateful to NATO and the United States for ending the aggression during the war. He stated that he had not been in favor of NATO's withdrawal and had, in fact, asked for an increase in troop levels for symbolic reasons and political influence. However he had come to accept the drawdown and believed Bosnia was indeed moving forward.

¶14. (C) Admiral Ulrich noted that he was visiting Bosnia as a direct result of the progress that Bosnia has made on defense reform. Bosnia's deployment of its EOD unit in Iraq is also a symbol of its graduation from security dependence to assistance. The Admiral encouraged Bosnia to consider similar deployments in other missions around the world and urged the Presidency to take quick steps to implement reforms, including defense property transfers.

Next Steps

¶15. (C) Admiral Ulrich told the Presidency he had also visited Sarajevo to determine whether the NATO presence here was well-suited to Bosnia's changing needs. After his meetings in Sarajevo he had determined that it is not. The NATO headquarters in Bosnia is structured to meet historical needs and not the emerging requirements of a modernizing Bosnia. For that reason, NATO staff will work with General Podzic and the MoD to redesign the HQ's structure and manning requirements by October 1. Komsic said he understood this approach and welcomed NATO's recommendations on realizing Bosnia's rapid accession.

¶16. (U) This message has been cleared by Admiral Ulrich's staff.
MCELHANEY